

Message Text

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PAGE 01 GUATEM 07150 182258Z

71-62

ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 EB-07 MC-02 OMB-01 AID-05 IGA-02

COME-00 TRSE-00 DODE-00 CIAE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 SS-15

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R 182235Z DEC 75

FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9437

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: MASS, GT

SUBJ: LANDING CRAFT FOR GUATEMALA

REF: A. STATE 293398 B. GUATEMALA'S A-180 OF 10/22/75

1. IN RESPONSE REFTTEL, EMBOFF MET WITH COL. LUIS URRUTIA, PRESIDENT, CHAMPERICO PORT AUTHORITY. DURING COURSE OF CONVERSATION, WHICH DELIBERATELY BEGUN AS REQUEST FOR TOUR DE HORIZON OF PORT PROJECT REPORTED REF. B, EMBOFF ASKED STATUS OF PURCHASE OF LANDING CRAFT. (LOCAL PRESS HAD REPORTED LAST OCTOBER THAT CHAMPERICO HAD ORDERED TWO LANDING CRAFT.) URRUTIA REPLIED THAT TWO LANDING CRAFT HAD BEEN BOUGHT IN US AND WERE EXPECTED TO BE SHIPPED FROM VIRGINIA EARLY NEXT YEAR. THEY WOULD BE USED, HE SAID, FOR CARGO HANDLING DURING EMERGENCIES SUCH AS HAD OCCURRED EARLY THIS YEAR WHEN THE AREA AROUND PIER SILTED UP. CRAFT WOULD BE ABLE TO MOVE CARGO DIRECTLY FROM BEACH TO SHIPS ANCHORED OFFSHORE.

2. AS TO HOW MANY ARE NEEDED, URRUTIA ANSWERED TWO. HE ADDED THAT BECAUSE THESE COULD BE CONSIDERED MILITARY ITEMS, HE HAD WRITTEN TO GUATEMALAN AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON TO ARRANGE FOR CLEARANCE OF PURCHASE. CHAMPERICO WOULD BE PAYING \$40,000 EACH FOR THEM OUT OF ITS OWN FUNDS. HE

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PAGE 02 GUATEM 07150 182258Z

SAID SHIPMENT WOULD BE EITHER THROUGH PANAMA CANAL TO

CHAMPERICO OR TO SANTO TOMAS FROM WHERE THEY WOULD BE TRUCKED OVERLAND. (LATTER WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE.)

3. VICE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS, AT LATER MEETING WITH EMBOFF IN WHICH MATTER OF LANDING CRAFT WAS RAISED IN PASSING, CORRABORATED URRUTIA'S STATEMENT THAT CHAMPERICO WAS PLANNING TO ACQUIRE LANDING CRAFT. (DID NOT SPECIFY NUMBER.)

4. COMMENT: EMBASSY HAS NO REASON TO DOUBT URRUTIA'S STATEMENT REGARDING DESTINATION OF TWO LANDING CRAFT, WHICH MAKE SENSE IN VIEW OF PAST PROBLEMS OF PORT. WE DO NOT KNOW WHY FIGURE OF SIX CRAFT WAS USED BY GUATEMALAN EMBASSY AND HAVE HEARD OF NO OTHER PALNS HERE TO BUY THIS TYPE CRAFT. EMBASSY RECOMMENDS THAT EXPORT OF TWO LCM-6'S BE APPROVED PROMPTLY. DEPARTMENT MAY WISH ADVISE GUATEMALAN EMBASSY FORMALLY OR INFORMALLY THAT US UNDERSTANDS EXPORT LICENSE FOR TWO CRAFT MEETS NEEDS TO WHICH THEIR SEPTEMBER NOTE REFERRED. SHOULD THE EMBASSY PRESS FOR ADDITIONAL CRAFT, MORE INFORMATION ON DESTINATION AND USE WILL BE REQUIRED.

5. ONCE LCM'S ARE IN GUATEMALAN POSSESSION, THERE IS OF COURSE NO WAY TO PREVENT THEIR BEING SHIFTED FROM CHAMPERICO TO ATLANTIC COAST(UNLESS WE WERE TO REFUSE THEM PASSAGE THROUGH CANAL). HOWEVER, THE SAME IS TRUE OF COUNTLESS OTHER BOATS, TRUCKS, PLANES, AND WEAPONS NOW IN HANDS OF CIVILIAN AGENCIES AND PRIVATE CITIZENS WHICH COULD BE RE-QUISITIONED BY GOG IN TIME OF TOTAL MOBILIZATION. UNLESS WE ARE TO STOP COMMERCIAL EXPORTS TO GUATEMALA OF ANYTHING THAT MIGHT HAVE MILITARY USE, WE SEE NO WAY TO RULE OUT POSSIBILITY OF SUCH DIVERSION. WE DO NOT, HOWEVER, VIEW THAT POSSIBILITY AS LIKELY IN THE NEAR FUTURE.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SALES, NAVAL SHIPS, END USE CHECKS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 18 DEC 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975GUATEM07150
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750441-0173
From: GUATEMALA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751229/aaaaayzs.tel
Line Count: 95
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 STATE 293398
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 10 SEP 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <10 SEP 2003 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <12 NOV 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LANDING CRAFT FOR GUATEMALA
TAGS: MASS, GT, US
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006